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'Net works for this author

Halifax native pens popular guides

By SUSAN LeBLANC
Business Reporter

His first book sold 135,000 copies.

But Jim Carroll insists this second one is the book he wanted to write all along.

The first thick volume, the Canadian Internet Handbook, has become a bit of a fixture alongside computer terminals across the country, since being released in 1994.

Now Mr. Carroll, a Halifax native and former chartered accountant, has teamed up with co-writer Rick Broadhead to produce The Canadian Internet Advantage: Opportunities for Business and Other Organizations.

"We call this the non-geek guide to the Internet," Mr. Carroll said Friday in Halifax, back in town from his Toronto-area home.

Mr. Carroll says the techie approach is the problem with the way many businesses have ventured onto the 'Net.

Perhaps someone in the office who's really plugged into computers has suggested the company get set up for e-mail or even a World Wide Web site. But there's usually no input from other departments on content, and how the firm might best use the tool, says Mr. Carroll.

"If it doesn't have a business strategy behind it, you're not going to get much out of it," he said.

As well, having an Internet address or Web site is a status symbol right now, and gives the impression your company is hip. But that's not a good reason to get involved, he says.

The new book is designed to ease the confusion. Carroll says it also tries to cut through the hype surrounding the Internet — because companies shouldn't expect to get rich quick.

He points to the Federal Express site as an example of a good use. A browser there can plug in the waybill number of his or her package and find out where it is.

Governments could look to the Internal Revenue Service in the United States, which has logged various forms onto its Web site, so citizens can print them and use them. That saves money and time, says Carroll.

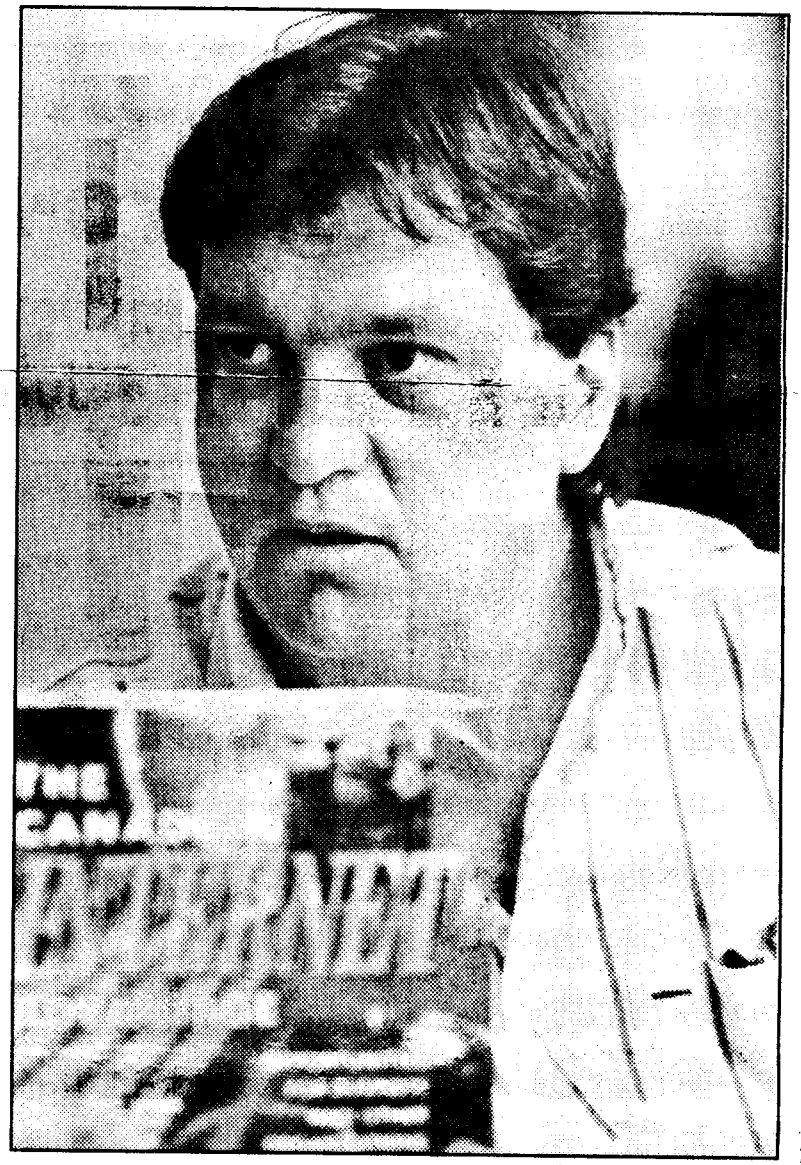
Then there's Ragu, the spaghetti sauce people, who offer a $2 coupon to people who access their Web site and read about their new products.

Companies should think about educating customers through the Internet, and getting feedback from them, says Carroll.

Non-profit agencies are also targeted in the book. For example, environmentalists have used the 'Net to rally support for causes such as stopping clearcut logging at Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia.

Carroll suggests we've barely scratched the surface of the Internet's use, because only a small percentage of individuals and businesses have signed on so far. As well, he says, young people are much more in tune with the technology, and will drive it.

Proof in the 'Net's future lies in the incredible interest the stock markets have given to Internet companies going public. The provider company UUnet went public recently, and the stock skyrocketed.



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Trolling early versions of computer bulletin boards while working as a Halifax accountant, Jim Carroll probably never dreamed he'd end up as Canada's best-known author of Internet books.